

Project to Improve Independent Medical Examinations
For the State of Washington
Department of Labor and Industries

Chapter 2

Problem Statement

Downloadable Version, Part 3 of 6

Originally submitted as Deliverable 2

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December 2001

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Injured Worker Survey

Introduction

The Stakeholder Interview section of this report referenced the use of the survey of Injured Workers (IWs) to test two expectations:

- 1) a streamlined, reliable and consistent process exists for administering and obtaining IMEs, (Expectation #2, p.32)
- 2) the IW's receiving IMEs are treated with dignity and respect. (Expectation #3, p. 32)

In the survey, questions were asked about the:

- examination scheduling process,
- how the IW's were treated during the examination itself, and
- the IW's satisfaction.

This section covers the survey methodology and findings regarding the above expectations. The survey questionnaire is included in Appendix 2 and a content analysis of the injured workers comments is included as Appendix 3.

Survey Methodology

Sample Selection

The survey was drawn from a sample frame provided by L&I of 32,816 claims with an IME payment code in calendar year 2000. The payment codes did not necessarily indicate that the IME exam occurred in CY 2000, merely that payment did occur in that time frame. The claims had a unique person id that allowed us to identify IW's with multiple claims.

Each claim was assigned to a diagnostic grouping based on the first reported ICD9CM code. The sample was restricted to those IW's with low back soft tissue injuries, shoulder tissue injuries and carpal tunnel syndrome. There were 7804 claimants in those categories. These claimants were further broken down into two claim complexity categories (low, high) , based on the payment code for their last IME in CY 2000.

About 26% of the claimants were classified as having a low complexity IME, 74% had a more complex IME or multiple examiners. A random sample of 750 claimants were drawn equally from each injury category. The sample size was determined by budgetary and time constraints. The sampling mechanism was designed to ensure that the sample was representative of the sample frame.

Within each injury category, the sample was drawn proportional to the overall population rate of high complexity vs low complexity exams (as defined for the purposes of this survey).

Of the 750 claims, 684 were found to have a CY2000 payment code indicating that an IME occurred in that year. (These were the codes for an IME not an exam conducted by the attending physician). Those without a valid CY 2000 payment code were excluded from the survey.

A small percentage of the claimants reported during the survey process that the IME examiner was actually their attending physician. Those claims should have been excluded from the sample and their results were excluded in the preceding analysis.

A telephone survey was conducted of the 684 injured workers in the sample. The calls were conducted between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm over a two week period including weekends. About 20% of the telephone numbers in the sample were no longer in service. Of those numbers that were still in service, we had a 95.6% connection rate. Those with

whom we did not connect were called back between 4 and 14 times at different times of the day and days of the week.

Response Rate

Of the connections, we had a 54.1% completion rate. Most of the connections where we did not interview the IW were due to the claimant being unavailable (vacation, out-of-town, at work, etc.) or having moved (28.8%). The few out right refusals to respond to the survey were associated with the claimants being involved in ongoing litigation (8.3%). A small group could not remember having an IME (8.8%). If an IW worker started the survey, they completed it.

The overall response rate for the telephone survey was 41.2% as shown in the table on the following table.

Injury Type	Low Complexity	High Complexity	Overall
Low Back	36.4%	37.8%	37.4%
Shoulder	50.0%	41.0%	43.5%
Carpal Tunnel	40.9%	44.4%	43.2%
Overall	42.4%	40.7%	41.2%

Demographic Characteristics

The age/sex breakdown of the sample differed significantly from the sample frame. The 99% confidence interval for the IW average age estimated from the sample was 42.5 years to 43.2 years. The average age in the study population was 40.5 years. Also there were significantly fewer females in the sample respondents than in the study population (31.8% versus 35.1 % Female). While statistically significant, the practical impact of these differences on the study results is unknown.

Weighting

The survey responses were weighted by the inverse of the probability of selection in the sample and inflated by the non-response rate shown in the previous page. This approach assumes that for the purposes of this analysis that the non-respondents would have responded similarly to that of the respondents to the questionnaire. While the size of the true biases in the results due to this assumption are unknowable, the approach taken is a generally accepted one for dealing with survey non-response and is commonly used by survey statisticians.

Based on this methodology, we estimated that 7112 of the 7804 claimants in the sample frame in the categories included in the sample would have had IMEs in CY2000.

Major Findings

Scheduling of Examinations

Unless otherwise noted, the estimates provided below are statistically significantly different at the 99% confidence level. In the study population, we estimate that:

1. About 80% of the IW's remembered receiving an explanation of the reason for the examination (Q1). About 15% of IW's said they did not receive an explanation of the reason(s) for the exam and 5% did not remember.
2. Of those receiving an explanation, 78% felt they understood it (Q3). About 7% did not understand it and 15% did not remember.
3. More of the respondents remembered the source of the explanations (Q2) coming from the claim managers and the Dept.'s written material (29% each) than from attending and IME physicians (20% and 22% respectively).
4. Approximately 42% of IW's indicated that obtaining an impairment rating was one of the reasons for ordering the exam (Q4). Almost 28% said it was not and about 32% did not remember.
5. For 86% of claimants the distance to the exam site was reasonable (Q5). For 12%

- it was not and less than 2% did not remember.
6. More than 89% felt they had been provided with clear directions to the examination site (Q6). Less than 6% said they were not and less than 5% did not remember.
 7. About 77% of the IW's felt the time between scheduling the exam and the appointment date was reasonable (Q7). For about 15% it was not and about 8% did not remember.
 8. Almost 55% of the IW's felt that the scheduling process considered their needs (Q8). About 37% did not feel the examination process considered their needs. About 8% did not remember.

Examination Process

Unless otherwise noted, the estimates provided below are statistically significantly different at the 99% confidence level. In the study population, we estimate that:

9. About 27% had their identity verified by giving their name (Q9). Only 17% of the IW's reported their identity verified by examination of their driver's license. About 32% had their identity verified by other means and about 25% said their identity was not verified.
10. About 70% were seen within 20 minutes of the appointment time (Q10). Less than 24% of IW's were not seen within 20 minutes of the appointment time. About 6% did not remember.
11. About 92% felt the staff (other than the doctor) treated them with dignity and respect (Q11). Less than 8% of IW's felt that the staff did not treat them with dignity and respect. About 2% did not remember.
12. About 70% felt the doctor treated them with dignity and respect (Q12). About 23% of IW's felt that the IME Doctor(s) did not treat them with dignity and respect. About 6% did not remember.
13. More than 55% of IW's remembered filling out a questionnaire for the IME

- doctor (Q13). Less than 15% said they did not fill out a questionnaire and about 29% could not remember whether or not they filled out a questionnaire.
14. Of those who remembered filling out the questionnaire, approximately 43% remembered the doctor discussing it with them (Q14). More than 38% said the doctor did not discuss it with them and 21% did not remember.
 15. About 63% of IW's remembered an IME doctor explaining the purpose of the examination (Q15). More than 20% said the doctor did not and 17% did not remember.
 16. About 53% of respondents remembered an IME doctor asking permission to start the examination (Q16). More than 23% of IW's said the IME doctor did not ask permission.
 17. Less than 49% of IW's remembered the IME doctor telling them that they would not be advising them directly on treatment recommendations (Q17). There is anecdotal evidence that some doctors did provide such advice. About 30% said the doctor did not advise them and 21% did not remember.
 18. About 33% said the doctor indicated that they would not assume any responsibility as an attending physician (Q18). More than 40% of IW's indicated that the IME doctor did not state that they would not assume any responsibility as the attending physician. About 26% did not remember.
 19. About 57% said that the IME doctor was very or somewhat informed about their work-related health problem (Q19). More than 30% of IW's stated that the IME doctor was somewhat uninformed or not at all informed about their work-related health problem. About 13% were not sure.
 20. Almost 53% of IW's said that the IME doctor asked enough or the right questions about their work-related health problems (Q20). Around 40% of IW's stated that the IME doctor did not ask enough or the right questions about their work-related health problem. More than 7% did not remember.
 21. About 65% of the IW's said that the doctor spent adequate time with them (Q21). More than 30% of IW's stated that the IME doctor(s) did not spend an adequate amount of time with them. About 5% did not remember.
 22. More than 66% of IW's stated that they did not experience unnecessary

- discomfort during the exam (Q22). Almost 30% of IW's stated that they experienced unnecessary discomfort during the exam. About 4% did not remember.
23. Almost 59% of IW's stated that their questions were answered (Q23). Almost 30% of IW's stated that their questions were not answered. More than 11% did not remember.
24. Of those who had unanswered questions, 13% were referred to someone who could give an answer (Q24), and about 77% were not referred to someone else who could answer their questions. More than 10% did not remember.

Satisfaction

Unless otherwise noted, the estimates provided below are statistically significantly different at the 99% confidence level. In the study population, we estimate that:

25. About 32% of IW's stated that the IME doctor(s) was (were) more concerned about them than L&I. About the same number, 30%, stated that the IME doctor was more concerned about L&I than them (Q25). Slightly less (28%) said the doctors were concerned about both and less than 10% did not remember.
26. About 71% of the IW's stated that the IME doctor(s) was professional (Q26). More than 21% of the IW's stated that the IME doctor(s) was not professional. Less than 8% did not remember.
27. About 54% stated that they did have a complete exam (Q27). About 36% stated that they did not have a complete exam. Almost 9% were not sure.
28. About 60% stated that their satisfaction with the exam was the same now as when they left the exam room (Q28). About 21% stated that their satisfaction with the exam was worse now than when they left the exam room. About 8% said it was better now. About 11% were not sure.
29. About 54% stated that they have not seen the exam and 38% said they have seen the exam (Q29). About 12% were not sure.
30. Of those who had seen the exam, about 56% said it was not fair and accurate and

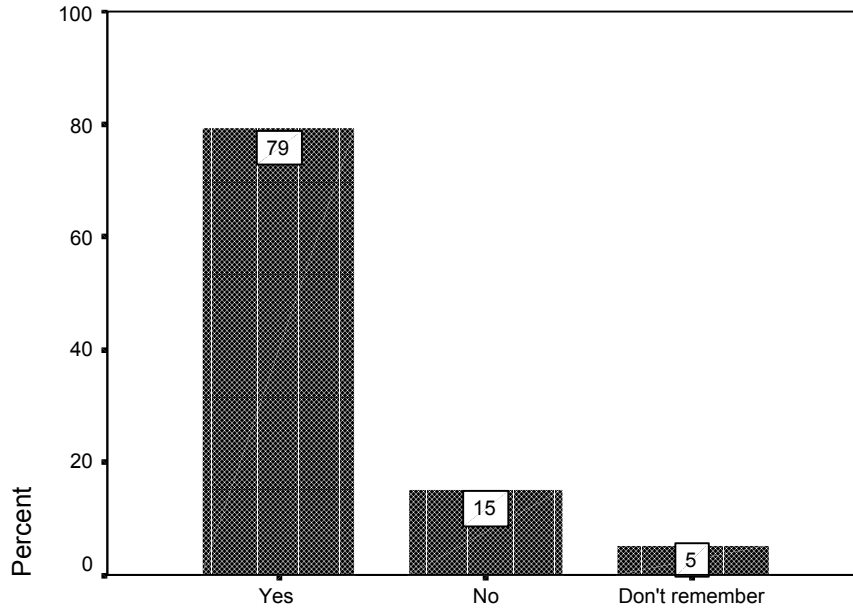
- 12% said it was (Q30). More than 14% were not sure.
31. Of those who said it was fair and accurate, 85% stated that they agreed with the IME doctor's findings (Q31).
32. About 74% of the IW's stated that they did not experience at least one pleasant surprise during the examination (Q32). (See the content analysis and verbal comments sections for detail.) Almost 18% said they did experience a pleasant surprise and about 8% were not sure.
33. About 72% said that they experienced at least one problem during the examination. A little more than 27% said that did not experience a problem during the exam (Q33). (See the content analysis and verbal comments sections for detail). About 4% did not remember.
34. More than 78% of the IW's stated that the office/exam room did not meet their expectations of a professional medical office. Less than 23% said that the exam rooms met their expectations of a professional medical office (Q34). About 2% did not remember.
35. About 44% said the IME exam was the same as other medical exams they received as part of their regular medical care (Q35). Almost 38% of IW's stated that compared to other medical exams they have received as part of their regular medical care, the IME exam was worse. More than 17% said it is better.
36. More than 53% said they did not receive an evaluation form from the Panel Company or examiner (Q36). Slightly more than 9% of the IW's stated that they received an evaluation form. About 37% did not remember.
37. If they received a form, about 79% said they filled it out (Q37). About 16% did not and another 16% did not remember.
38. About 75% of all IW's in the study population said that they did not file a complaint with the Department (Q38). More than 19% did not remember and about 5% said they filed a report.
39. About 66% of the IW's stated that they had at least one suggestion to improve the IME process (Q39). About 30% did not have suggestions and about 4% were not sure.

Content Analysis

The accompanying Appendix 3 contains the comments made by injured workers. They have been grouped by themes and within themes are coded as neutral, positive or negative. A general approach to understanding a survey response is to look up the corresponding theme and examine both the negative and positive comments. This often provides insights into the reasons an IW gave a particular response.

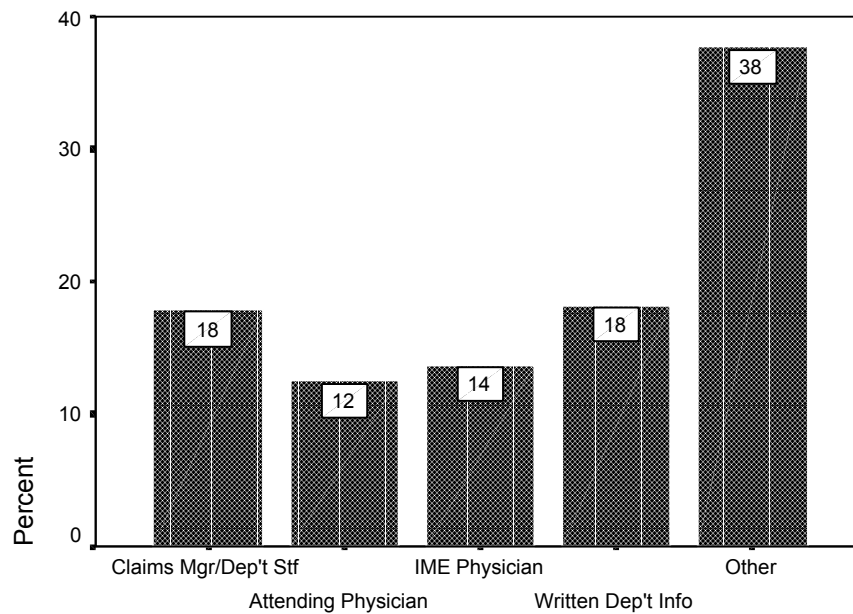
Percent of Responses By Question – Injured Worker Survey

Q1: Was the reason for this exam explained to you?



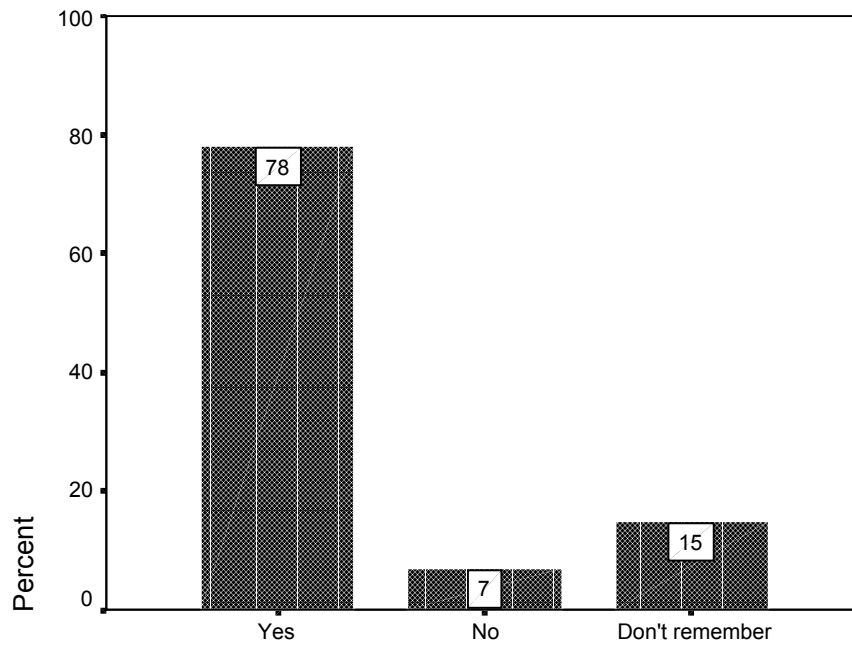
Q1\$

Q2: [If Yes], Who explained the reason for the exam to you? [If No, Skip to Q4]



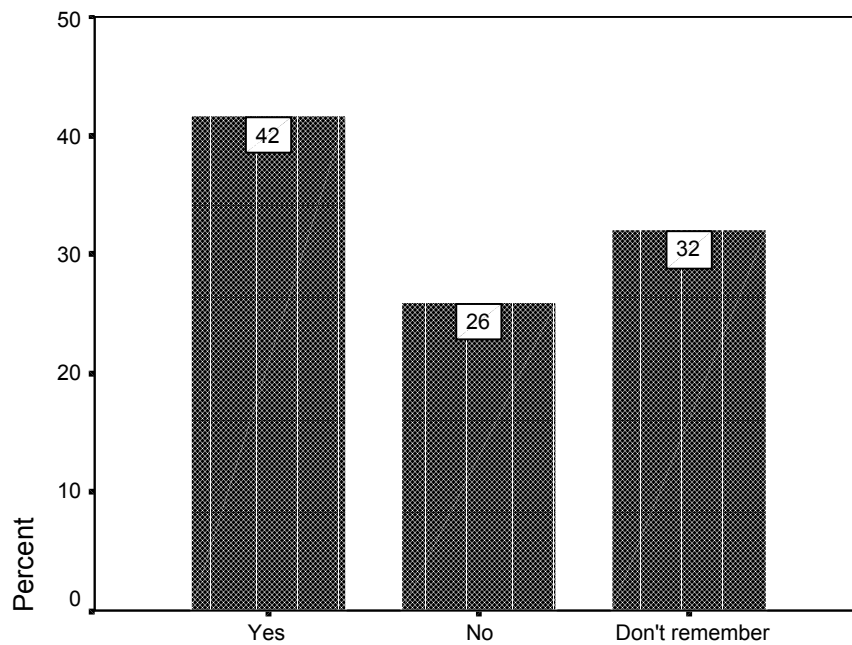
Q2\$

Q3: Did you understand the explanation?



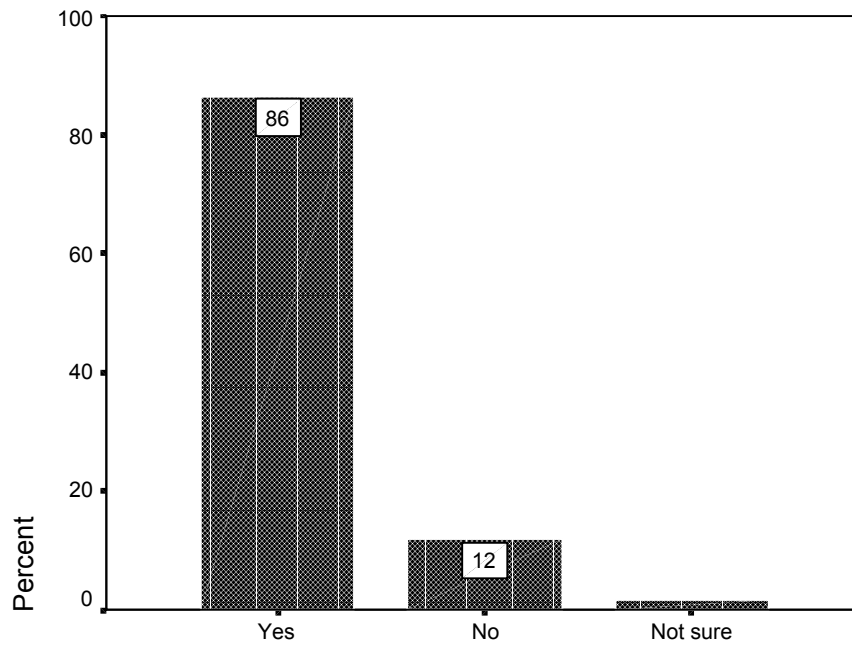
Q3\$

Q4: Was assigning an impairment (permanent disability) rating one of the reasons for ordering the exam?



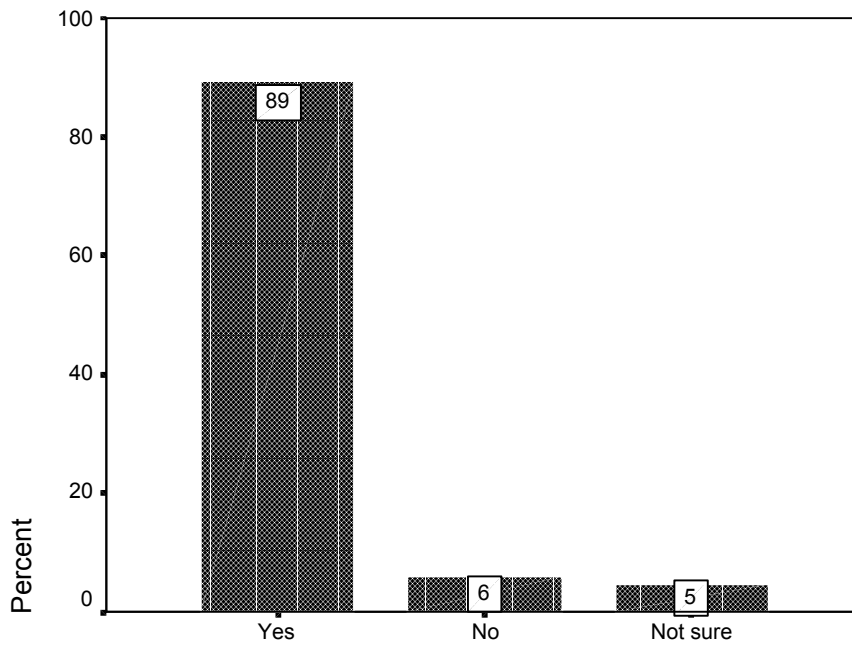
Q4\$

Q5: Was the distance to the examination site reasonable?



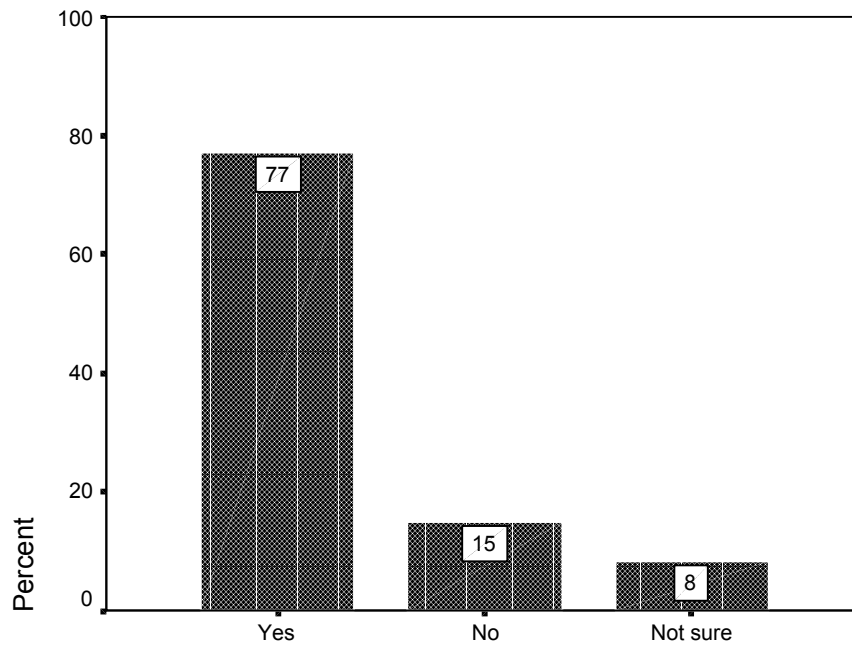
Q5\$

Q6: Were the directions to the exam site easy to understand?



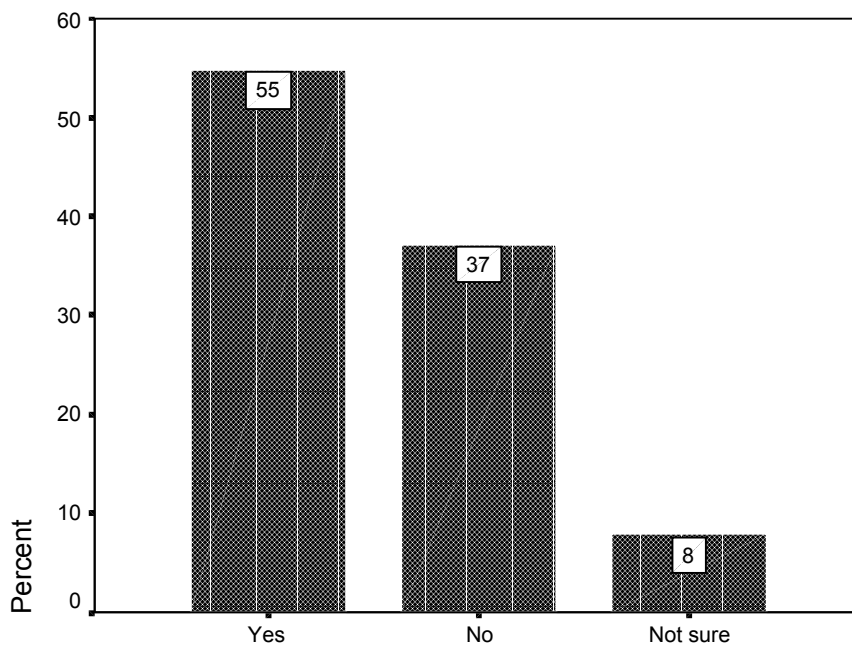
Q6\$

Q7: Was the time between when the exam was scheduled and the time of the appointment reasonable?



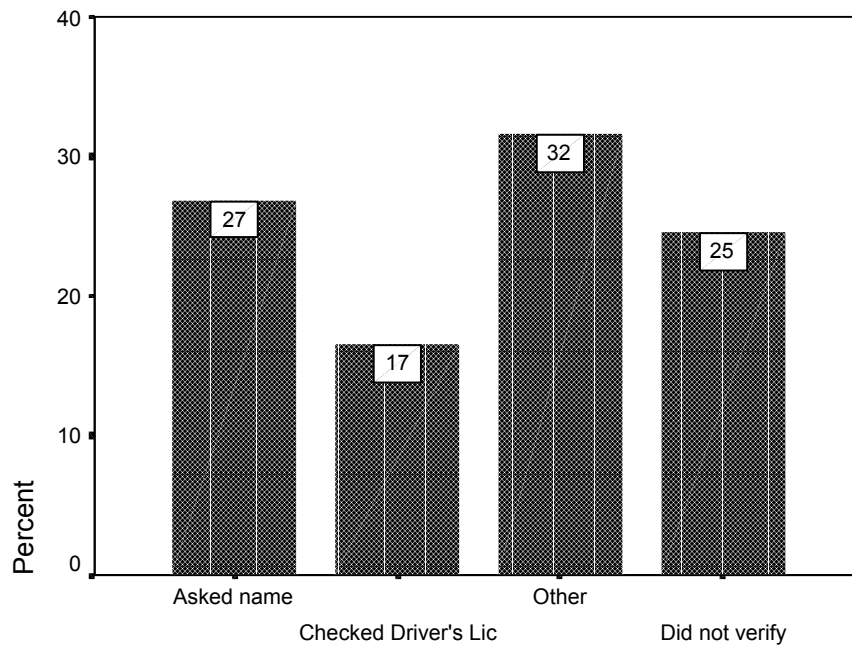
Q7\$

Q8: Did the scheduling process consider your needs?



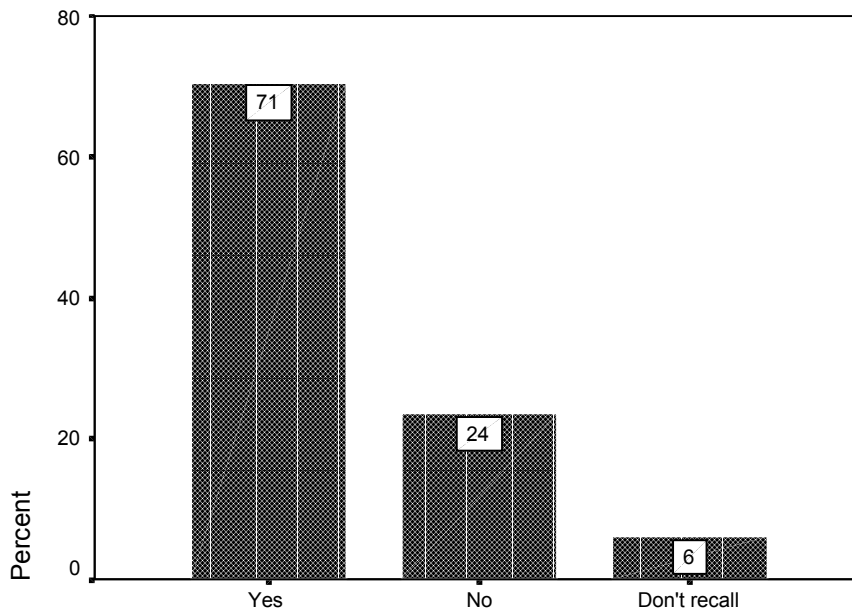
Q8\$

Q9: What did the doctor or the office staff do to verify your identity?



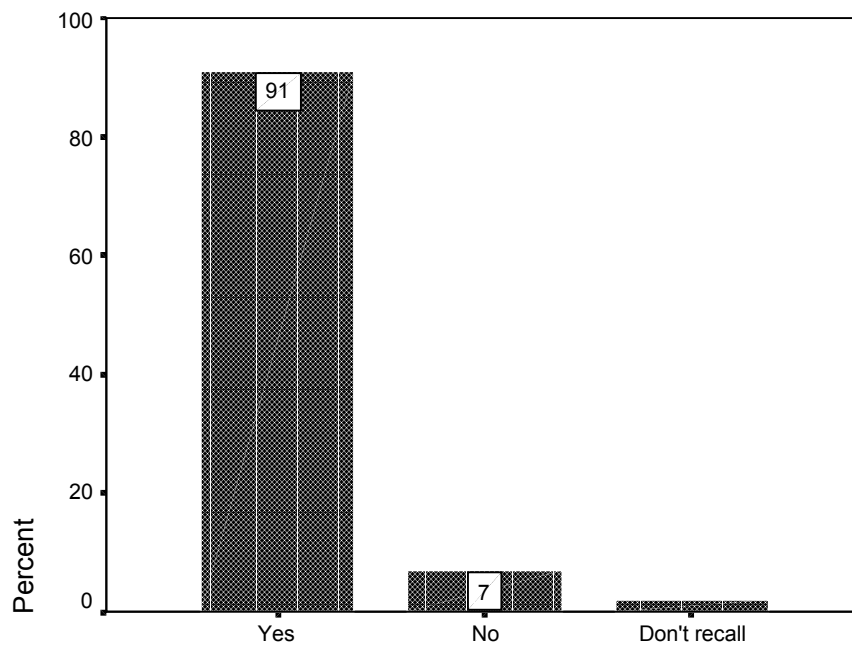
Q9\$

Q10: Were you seen within 20 minutes of your appointment time?



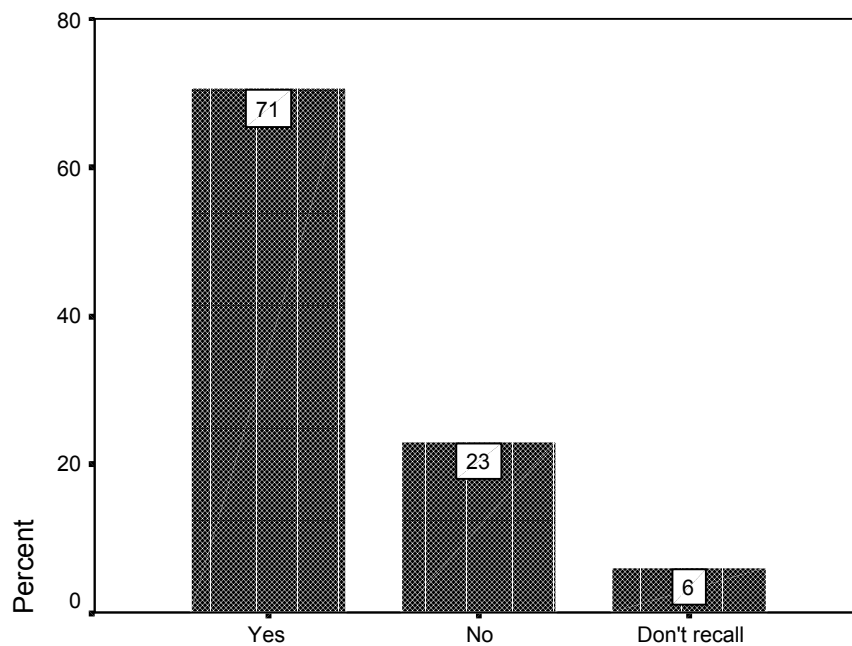
Q10\$

Q11: Did the staff other than the doctor treat you with dignity and respect?



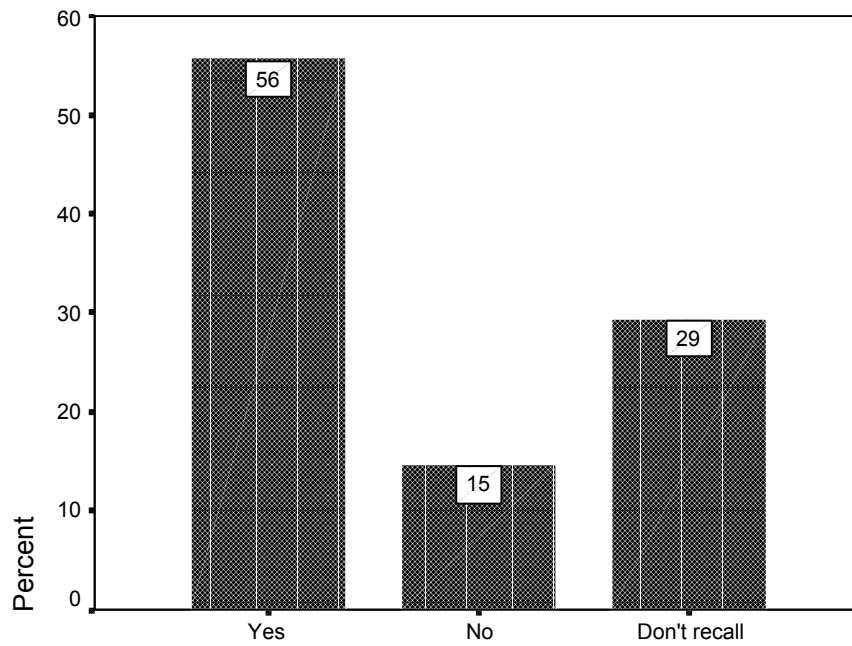
Q11\$

Q12: Did the doctor treat you with dignity and respect?



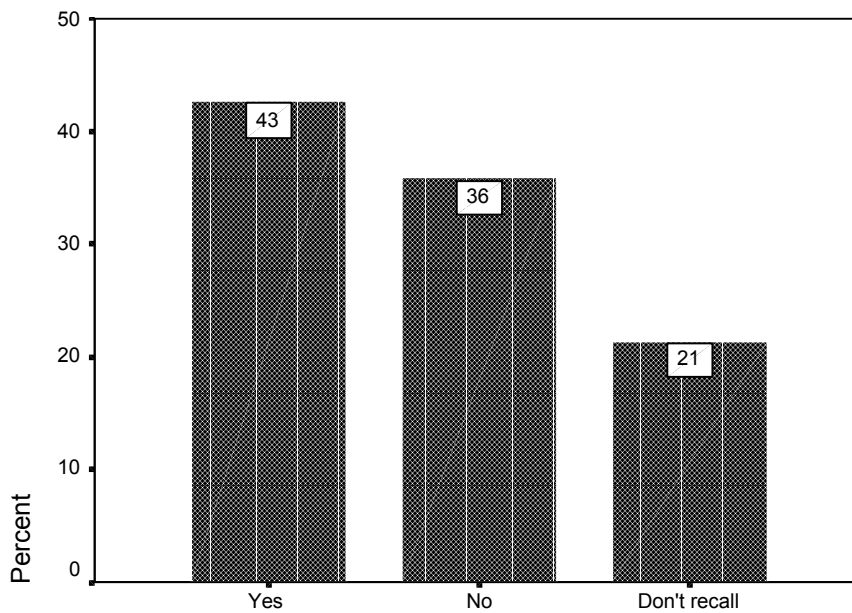
Q12\$

Q13: Did you fill out a questionnaire for the examining doctor? [If No, Skip to Q15]



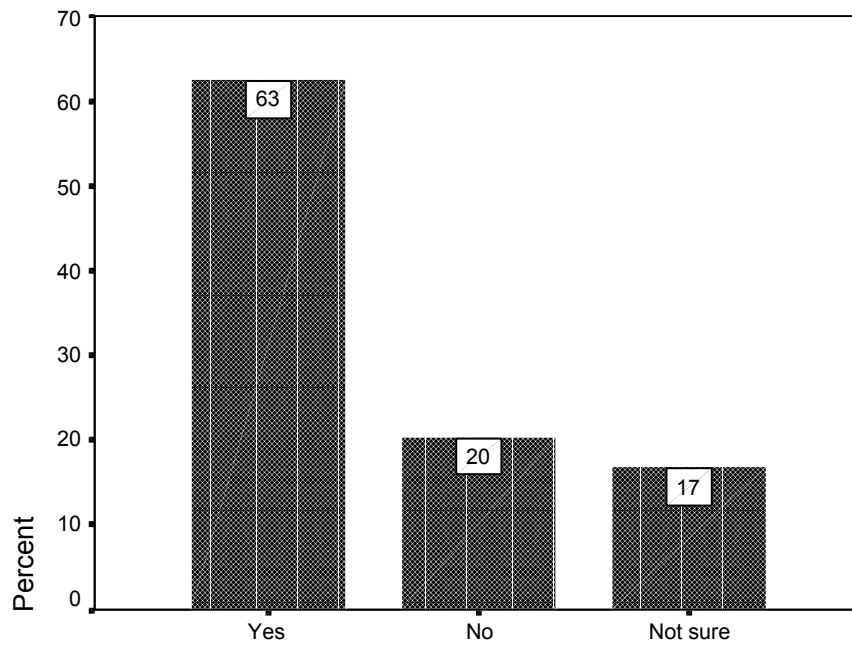
Q13\$

Q14: [If you filled out a questionnaire, yes to Q13] Did the examining doctor review the answers to the questionnaire with you?



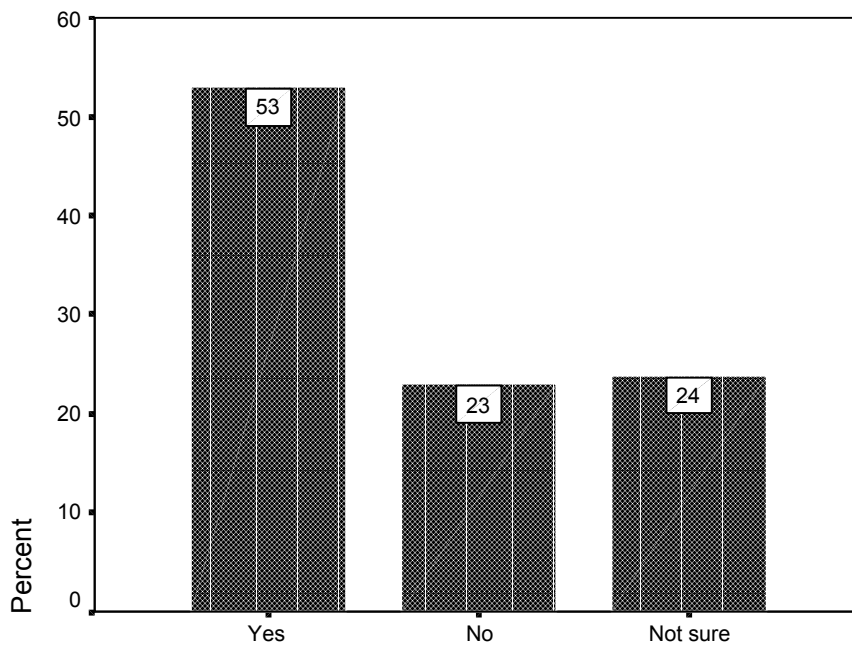
Q14\$

Q15: Did the examining doctor explain the purpose of the examination?



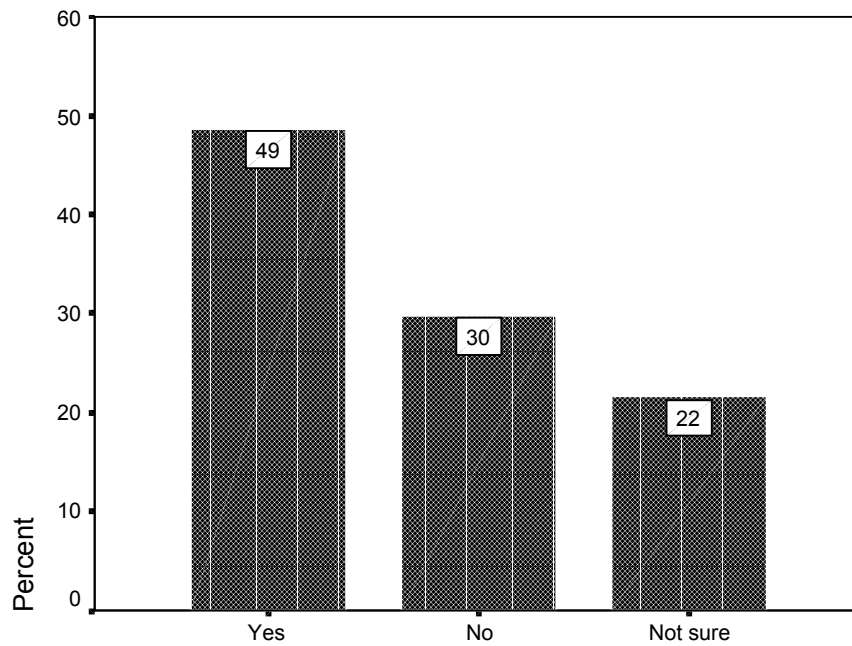
Q15\$

Q16: Did the examining doctor ask your permission to perform or begin the examination?



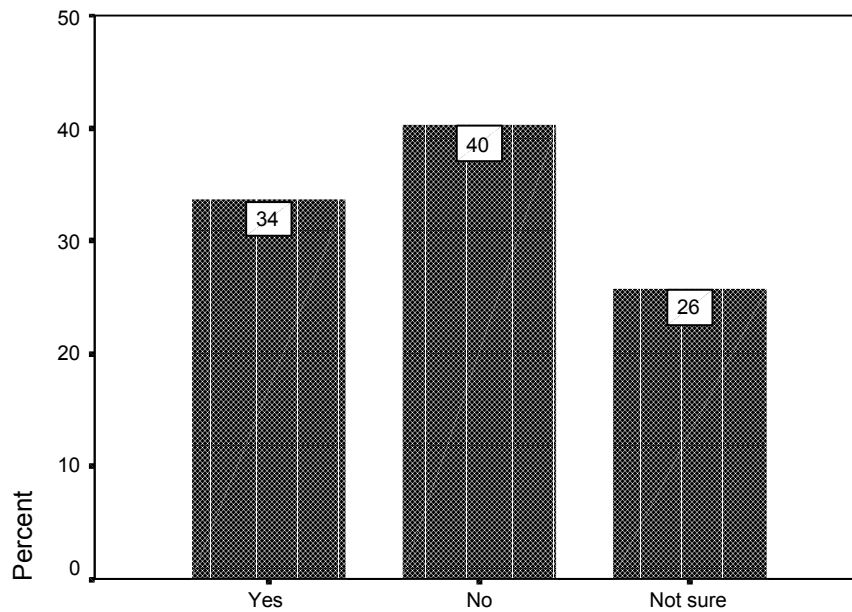
Q16\$

Q17: Did he or she explain that he or she would not be advising you directly on treatment recommendations?



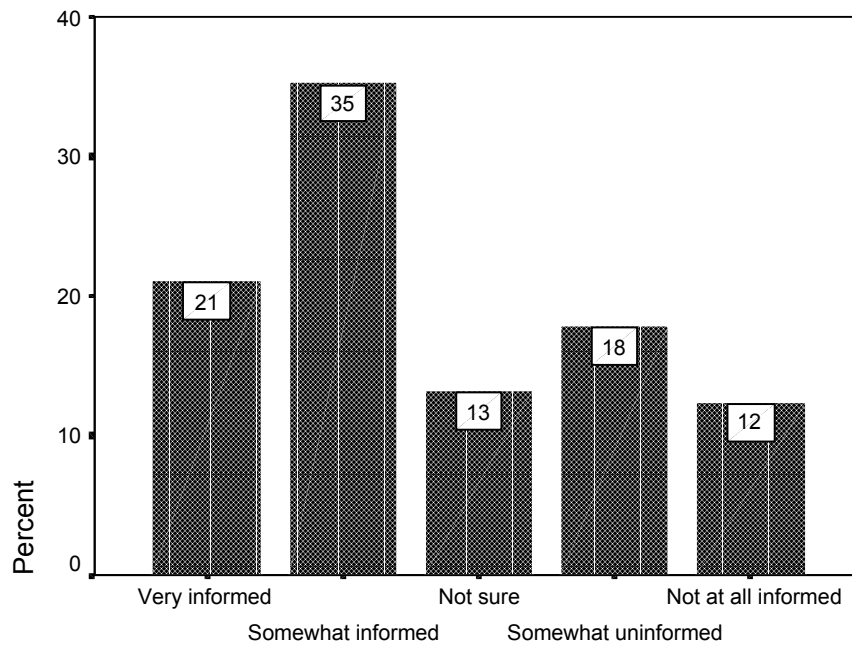
Q17\$

Q18: Did the examining doctor explain that he or she was not assuming any responsibility as an attending physician?



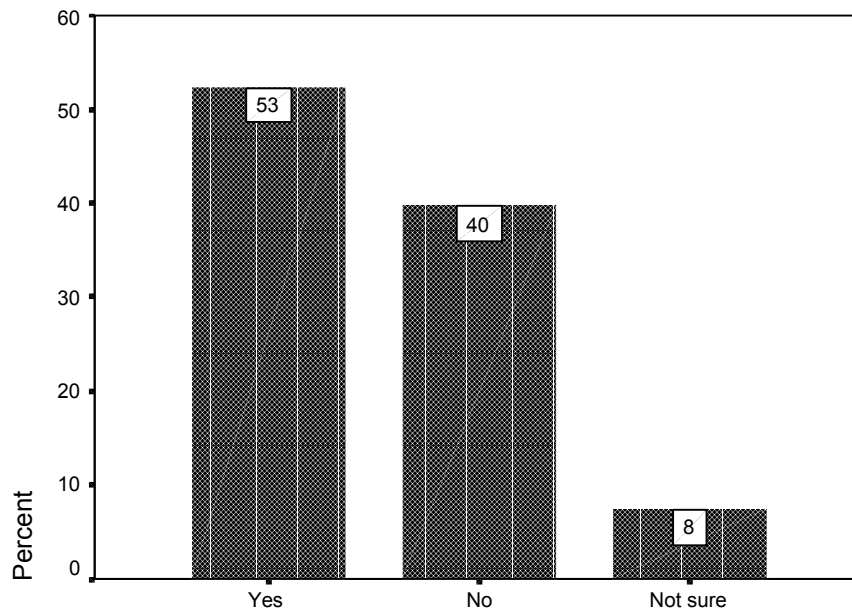
Q18\$

Q19: In your opinion, how much did the examining doctor know about your work-related health problem?



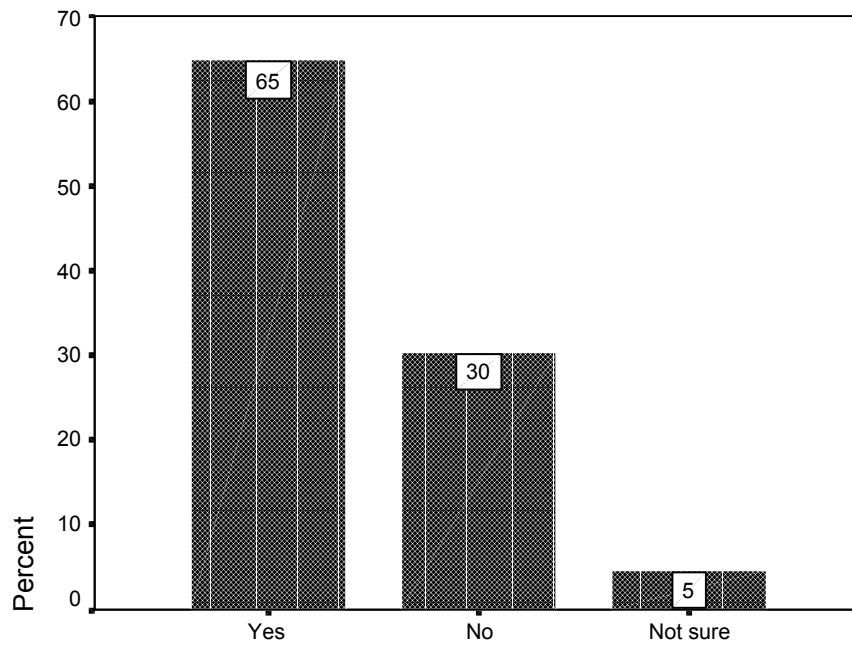
Q19\$

Q20: Do you believe that the doctor asked enough or the right questions to allow him or her to understand your work-related health problem?



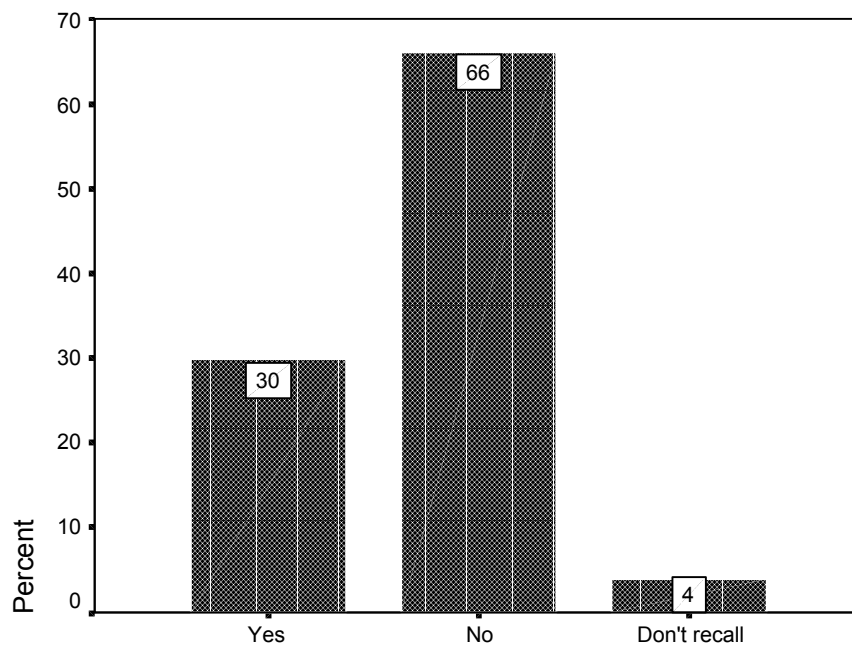
Q20\$

Q21: Did the total amount of time the examining doctor spent with you seem adequate?



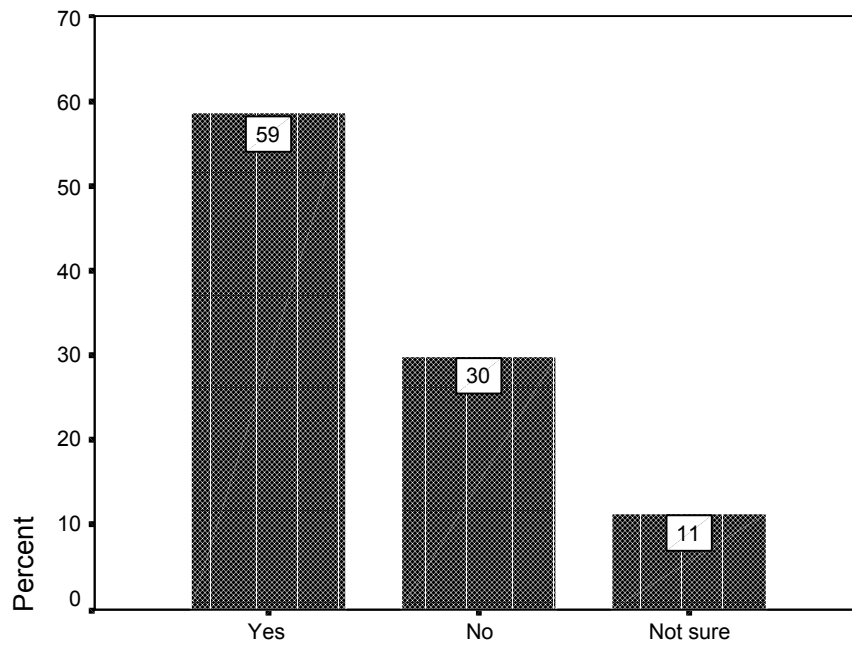
Q21\$

Q22: Did you experience any unnecessary discomfort during the exam?



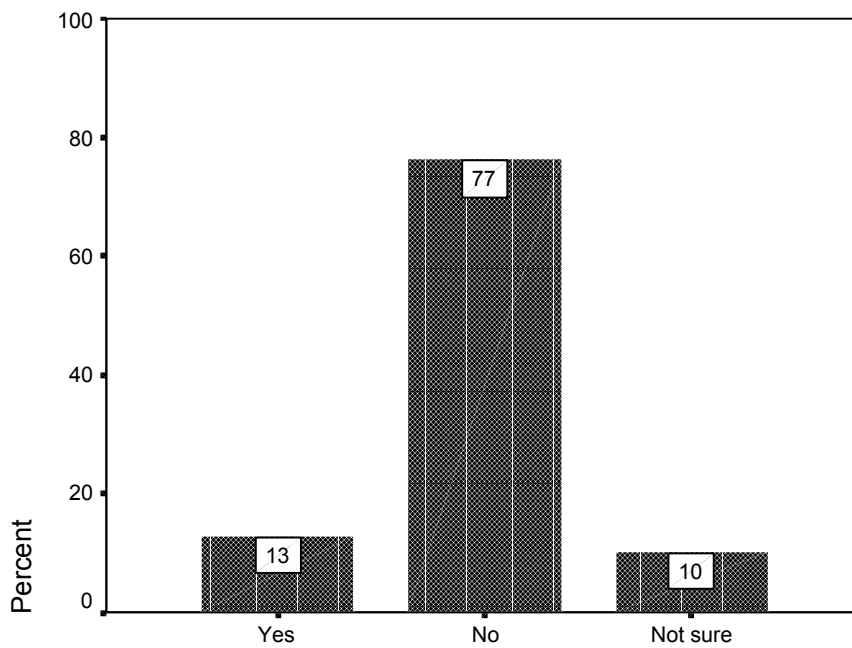
Q22\$

Q23: Were your questions answered? [If No, Skip to Q25]



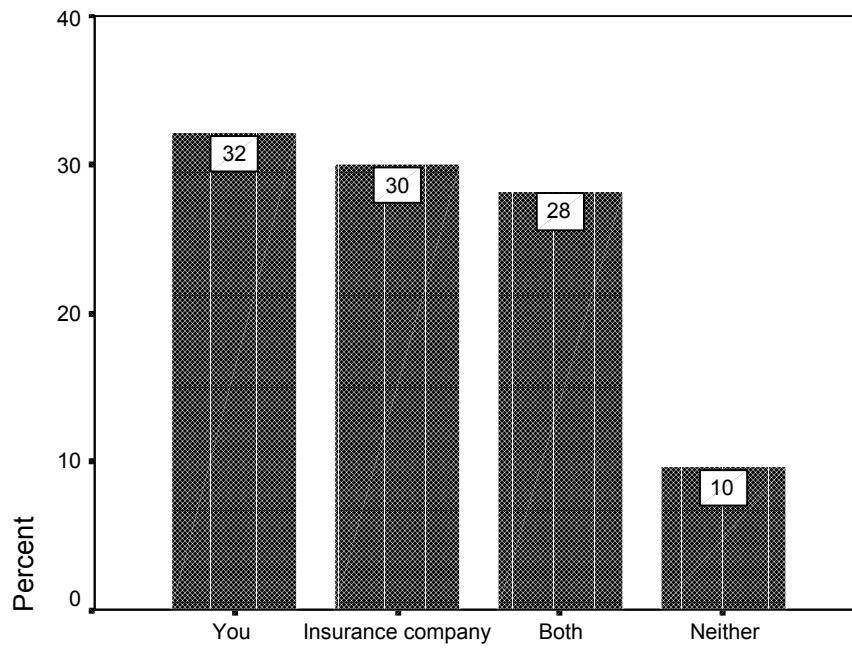
Q23\$

Q24: If you had any questions that were not answered, were you referred to your personal doctor, claim manager, or someone else who could give you an answer?



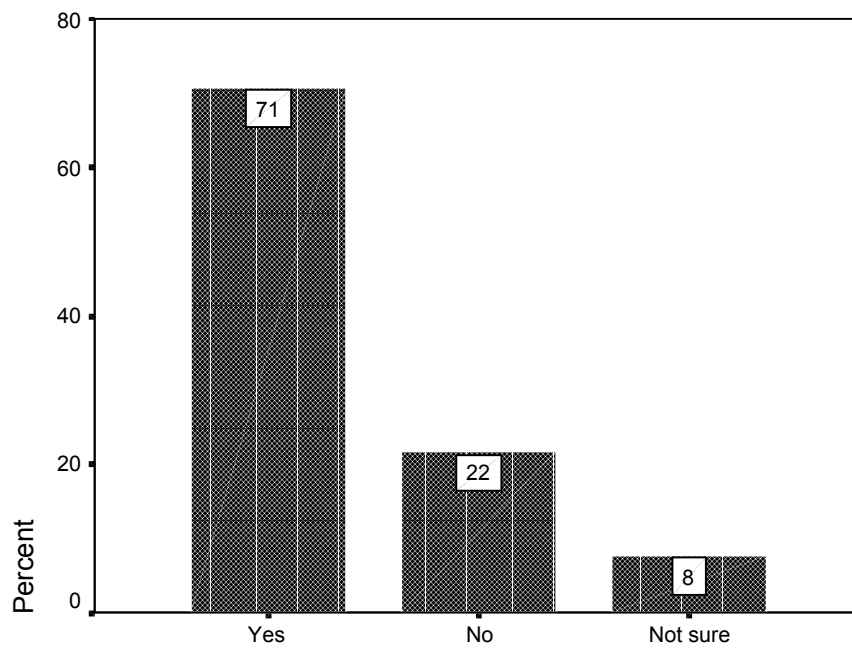
Q24\$

Q25: Did the examining doctor seem more concerned about:



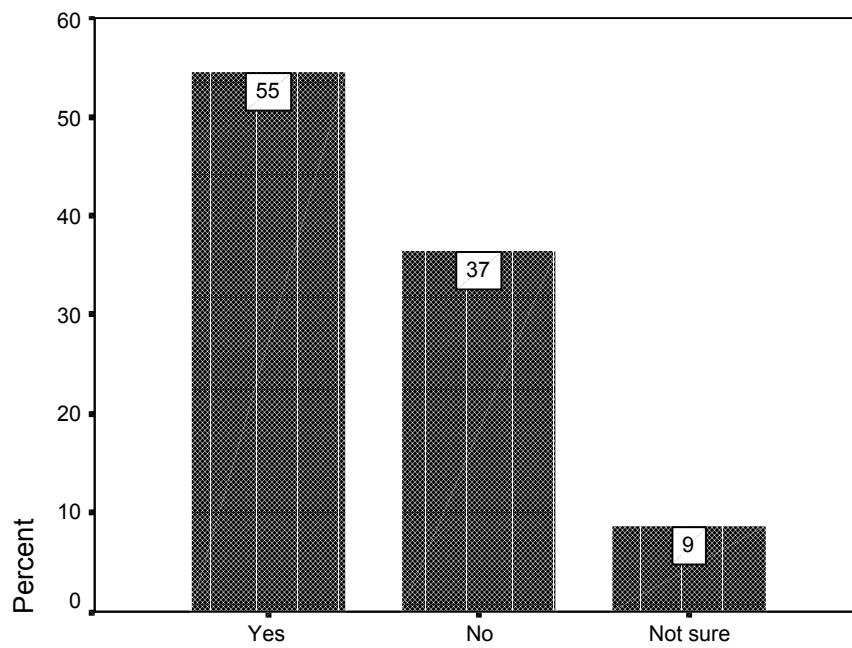
Q25\$

Q26: Did you think the examining doctor was professional?



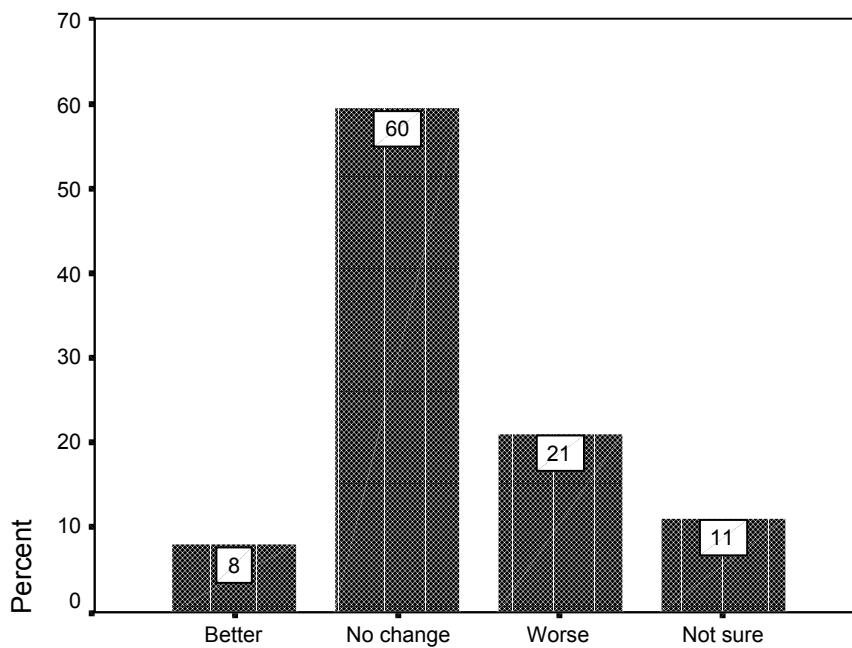
Q26\$

Q27: Do you think that the examination was complete?



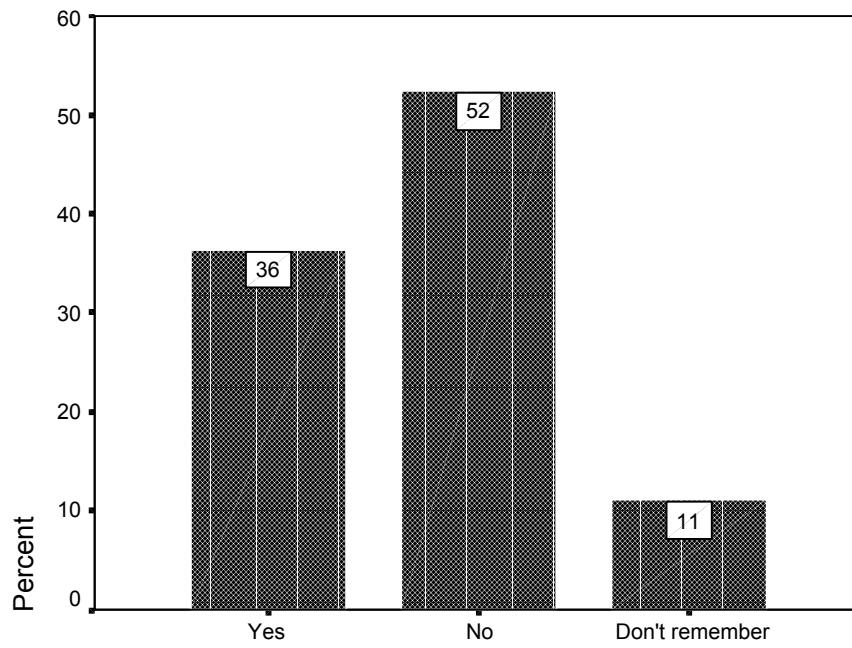
Q27\$

Q28: Compared to when you walked out of the exam room, is your satisfaction with the exam now: Better; No Change; Worse



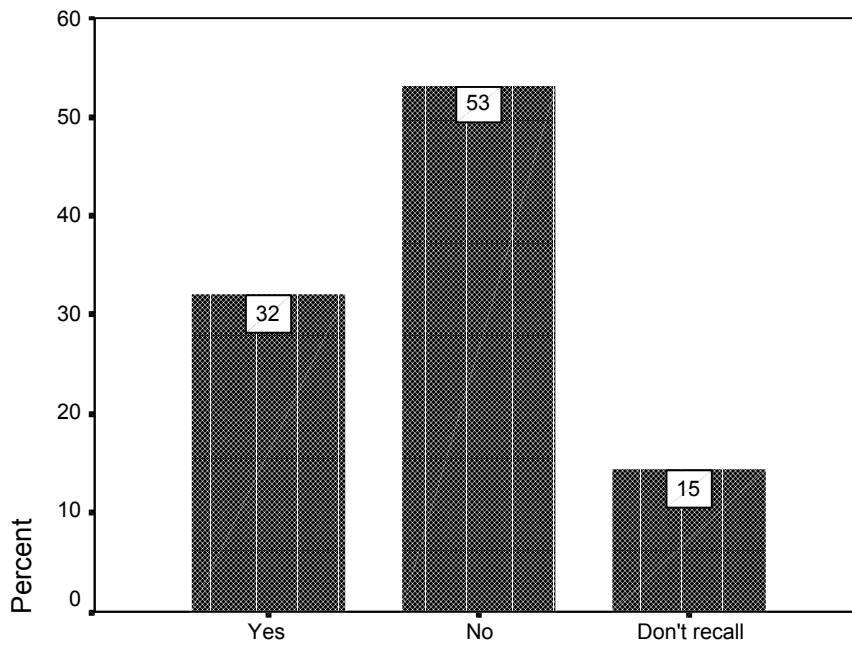
Q28\$

Q29: Have you seen the report of the IME? [If No, Skip to Q32]



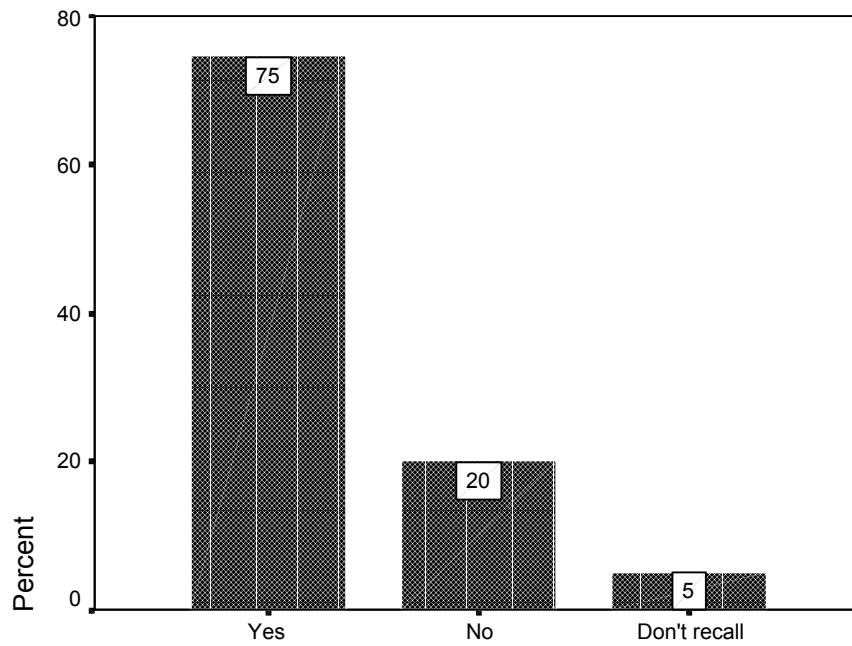
Q29\$

Q30: [If yes] Do you believe it was fair and accurate?



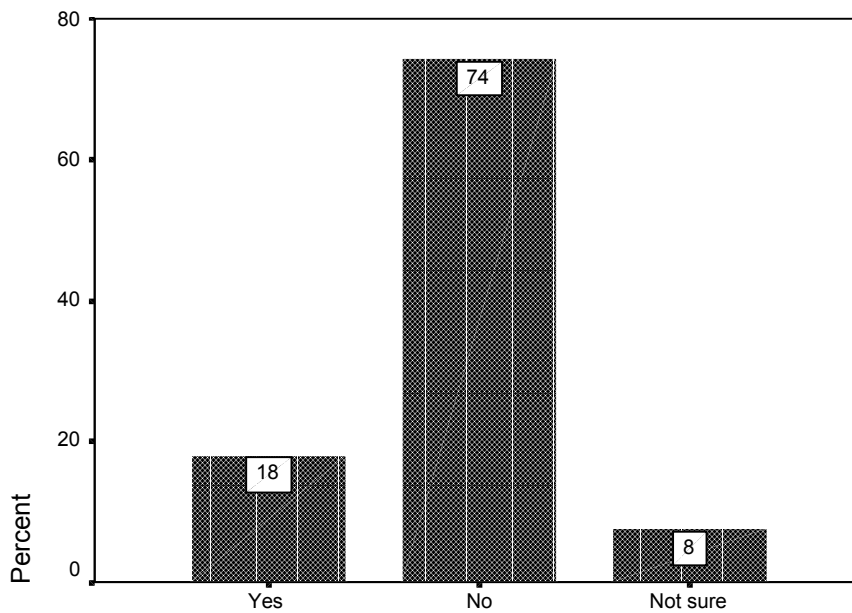
Q30\$

Q31: [If yes] Did you agree with the doctor's conclusions?



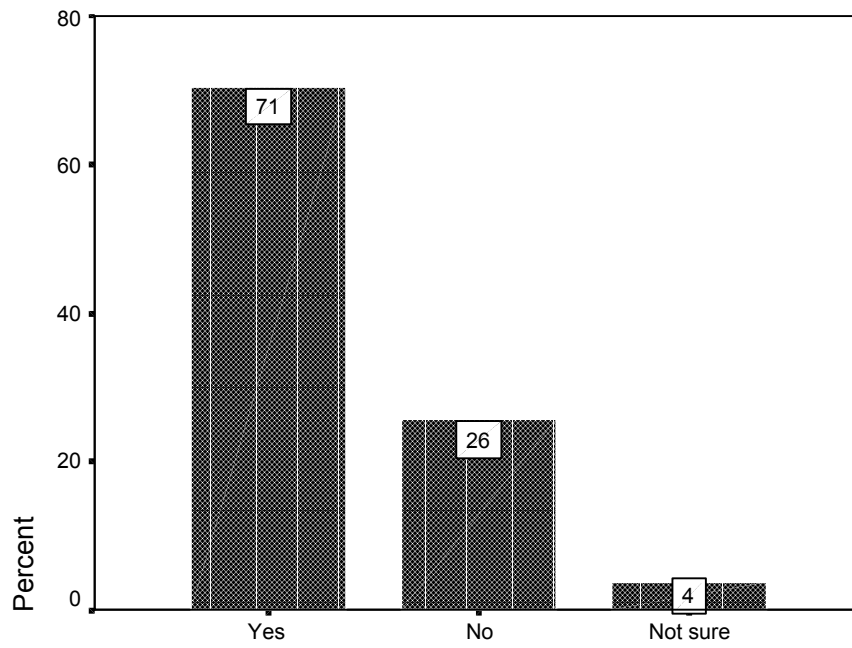
Q31\$

Q32: Did you experience any pleasant surprises about the examination or the way you were treated?



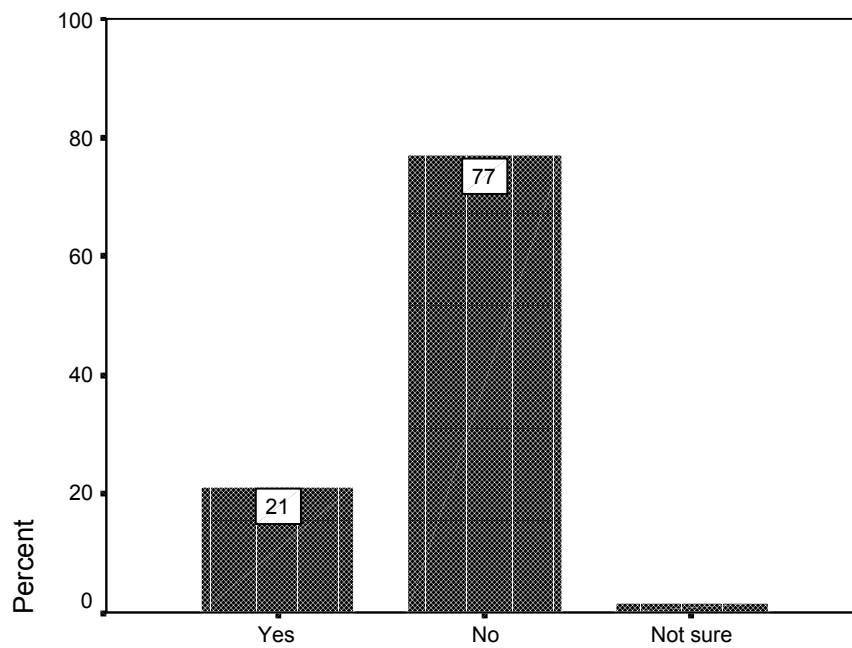
Q32\$

Q33: Did you experience any problems during the examination?



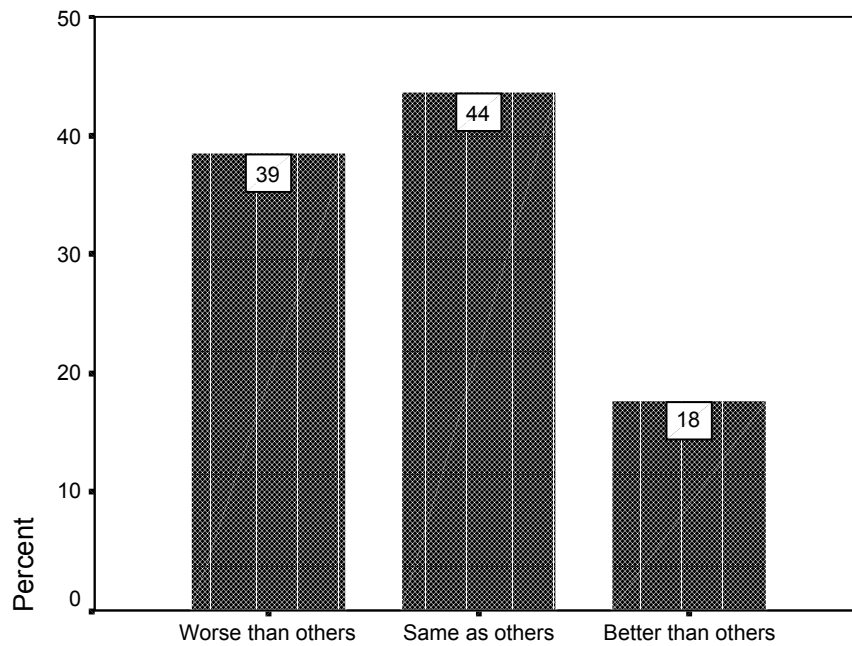
Q33\$

Q34: Did the office/exam room meet your expectations of a professional medical office?



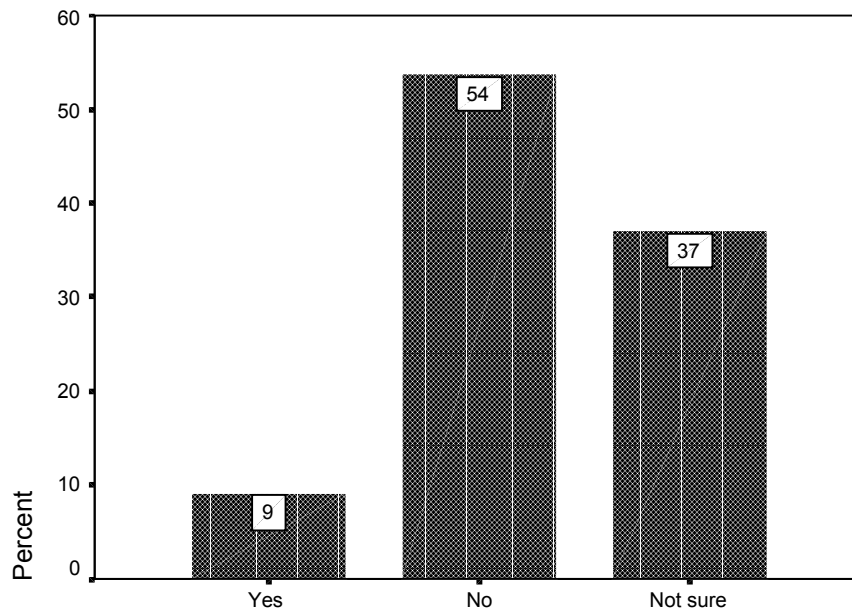
Q34\$

Q35: How would you rate this exam compared to other examinations you have received as part of your regular medical care for your work-related health problem?



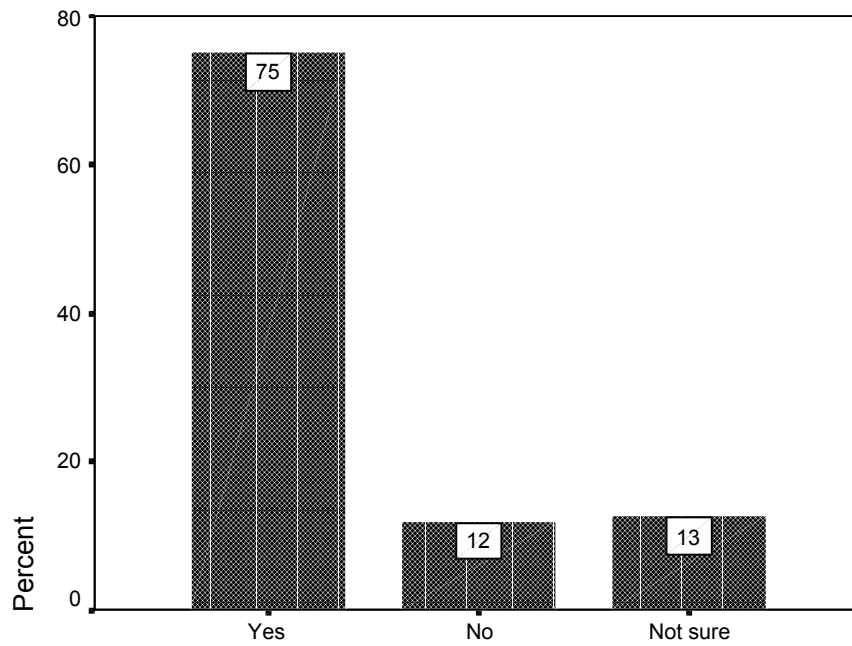
Q35\$

Q36: Did the IME examiner or panel provide you with an evaluation form? [If No, Skip to Q38]



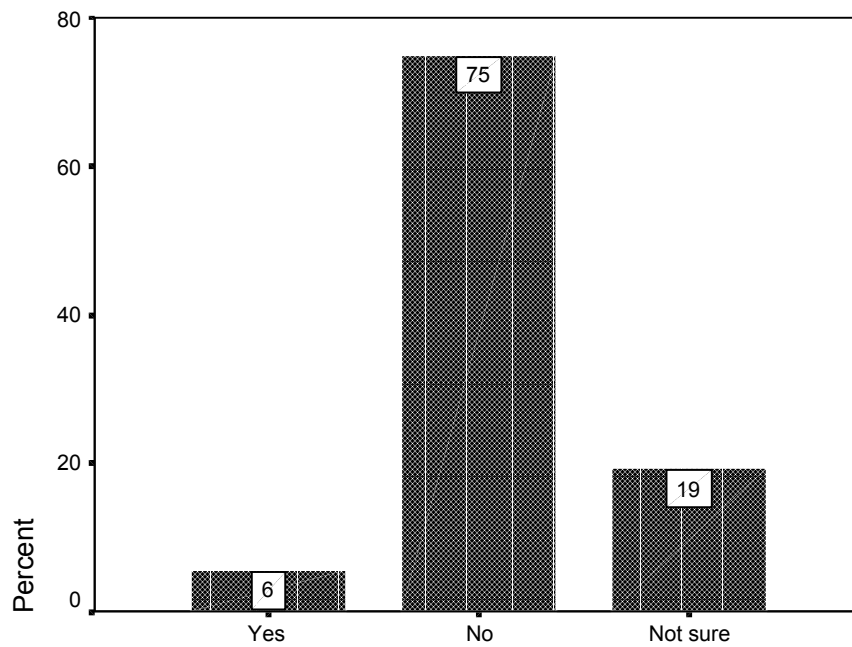
Q36\$

Q37: [If Yes] Did you fill out the evaluation form?



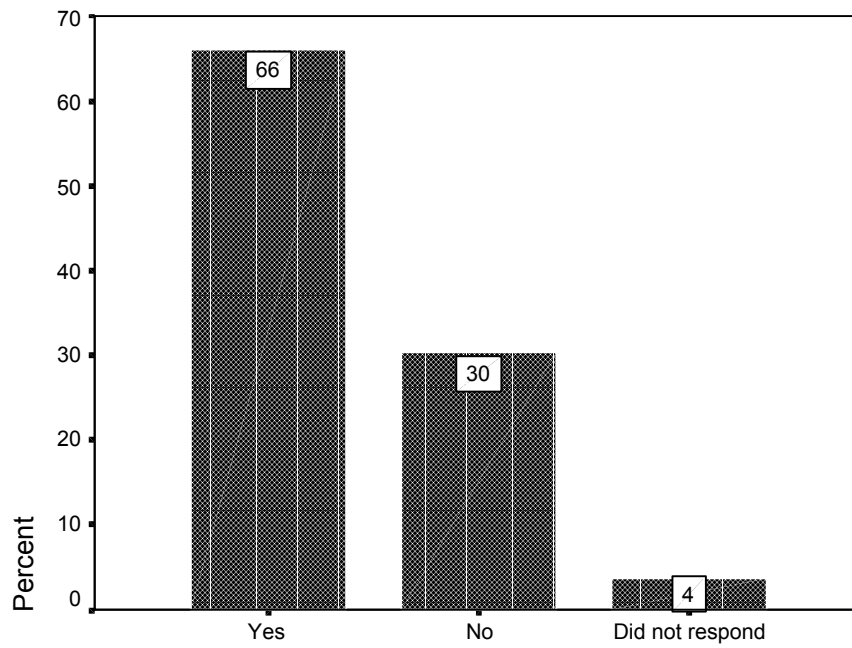
Q37\$

Q38: If you were dissatisfied with any part of the exam or exam process, did you file a complaint with the Department?



Q38\$

Q39: Do you have any suggestions to improve the IME process?



Q39\$